

Erie County Department of Environment & Planning

Recycle Coach Customization Activities & Outreach Campaign

The Problem: There is no uniform list of what can be recycled, handled as a special waste or trashed in Erie County. Each community has a different menu of curbside and drop-off location services that it offers to its residents. If the wrong items are placed in recycling, this is contamination which increases processing costs and can decrease the value of recycled commodities.

It is difficult for residents to access location specific recycling and reuse information in Erie County. It is often a multi-step process for residents to get answers to the question, “Is this item garbage or recycling or a special waste”. Sometimes they call their town municipal government and are referred to the Erie County waste hotline for answers. Residents can get frustrated as they are shuffled from person to person to have their questions answered.

The Solution: Erie County Department of Environment & Planning (DEP) purchased a subscription to a customizable recycling information platform, Recycle Coach. The platform subscription and media outreach were funded as part of the workplan for the NYSDEC Municipal Waste Reduction & Recycling grant that was awarded to Erie County. The app connects citizens with local disposal information, educational tools for all ages and collection requirements to make recycling a breeze. Erie County DEP staff collected route schedules and curbside and drop-off item lists for the 44 communities in Erie County to customize the Recycle Coach application.

With the free downloadable application, residents can:

- Get alerts for regular garbage and recycling collection days and receive notices if collections are delayed.
- Receive instantaneous answers to recycling questions.
- Become recycling experts with a comprehensive “What Goes Where?” search tool for thousands of items, including local disposal information, disposal costs and recycling event dates.
- Help reduce the amount of contamination in the curbside recycling stream by learning how to make mindful and informed recycling decisions.

This free service puts customized recycling information right at our residents’ fingertips, any time of day, anywhere. There are three ways to use the Recycle Coach app:

- Go to the Erie County web-site (www.erie.gov/recycling) and access the service without installing anything;
- Download the mobile app to your Android or Apple smart phones;
- Ask Alexa or Google Home to go to Recycle Coach.

Target Audience: Erie County has 918,000 residents. Erie County identified the target audience for the Recycle Coach app as people who care about recycling and have smart phones. Next an outreach strategy was developed to introduce residents to the app by using a combination of paid media, social media, email lists, and trusted community leaders.

- Paid media – utilized media budget to purchase:

- A total of 1,440 15 second ads on radio stations with different genres and audiences: country, urban; easy listening; and classic rock. These ads ran in December 2020. In addition, Erie County participated in several two-minute interviews about the program which were broadcast in the morning show timeslot. The ads will run for 20 days and reach 480,000 listeners per day;
- A total of twelve 30 second sponsorships on the public radio station in December 2020. The ads will run for 7 days and reach 160,000 listeners per week;
- A half page color ad in the Christmas section of the local weekly papers the Bee. The Bee has nine local publications in Erie County and distributes 60,000 paper copies per week.
- Social media – created Facebook and Instagram Recycle Coach content which were displayed on Erie County pages in December & January.
- Email lists – sent an email describing the Recycle Coach app to DEP’s 5,000-person email list in January 2021.
- Trusted community leaders – The Erie County Environmental Management Council agreed to champion the Recycle Coach platform and introduce it to members constituent groups and contacts.

Outputs & Outcomes: Erie County will track the number of subscribers and the use of the web service and the app via metrics provided by Recycle Coach. After the initial push, there will be periodic media campaigns throughout 2021 to increase service users. The outcomes are anticipated to be more seamless communication with residents about their trash and recycling, higher satisfaction in government response to recycling and disposal questions in Erie County, a reduction in contamination in curbside recycling, and an increase in correct handling of special wastes.